

CHAPTER - V

Reservation Policy and Electoral Process

Caste has increased its hold over public life, despite such modernisation as there has been in India since independence. Many Indians believed at the time of independence that caste was on its way out and many ritual rules maintaining distances between castes were declining or dying out. However, caste not only held its ground but began to strengthen its hold in one sphere of life, that of politics. In independent India, the provision of constitutional safeguards to the backward sections of the population, especially the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, has given a new lease of life to caste.¹ Politics is a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for the realisation of certain goals, and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing and emerging allegiances in order to mobilise and consolidate positions.² The important thing is organisation and articulation of support, and where politics is mass-based the point is to articulate support through the organisation in which masses are to be found.³ It follows that where the caste structure provides one of principal organisational clusters along which the bulk of the population is found to live, politics must strive to organise through such a structure.⁴ The alleged 'casteism' in politics' is thus no more and no less than politicisation of caste.⁵

The politicians mobilise caste groupings in order to organise their power. The backward castes came for long to be regarded as a political asset. "It was Ram Manohar Lohia who conceived the idea of uniting the backward castes and made them the social base of the Samyukta Socialist Party, distancing these communities from the caste-based vote banks of the Congress".⁶ The strategy climaxed when Yadavas, Kurmis, Koeris and Benias accounted for 31.6 per cent of Bihar's M.L.As in 1967 elections. The pattern was repeated in the 1969 mid-term polls. But the representation of backward castes declined sharply when the Congress returned to power in Bihar in 1972, and the party did not go up again until the rise of the Janata Party in 1977. In Uttar Pradesh in the SVD Ministry headed by Charan Singh in 1967 three ministerships were given to the peasant backward castes, including Yadavas and Kurmis, because these castes made considerable gains in the elections. In 1980 the then Chief Minister, Madhavasinh Solanki had formed an alliance of Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims (KHAM) to encounter the force of the upper castes, especially the Patels. Mr. Solanki's KHAM managed to create a new unprivileged support base for the Congress (I). The real below came to KHAM as a result of the anti-reservation agitation that swept the State in 1985 following Mr. Solanki's decision to give 28 per cent reservation to the other backward castes, popularly known as Bhaksi castes after the Bhaksi Commission report which identified 82 other backward castes as

in need of reservation. Since 1977, a tacit consensus seems to have emerged that all political bodies — Zilla Parishads, State Cabinets, Party Committees — should be so constituted as to represent the major castes and communities.⁷

Every Political Party in India seeks support of backward castes because these castes play an important role in influencing the outcome of elections. The political parties include various welfare schemes for backward castes in their election manifestos. In order to hold its power and to gain support of these castes in the next elections the party in power tries to implement the welfare schemes promised to backward castes at the time of elections. Myron Weiner writes that a reversal of preferential policies by either Central or State government would be politically costly. To terminate or in any way reduce the benefits provided for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, or backward castes would incur political losses from these communities.⁸

II

Election 1989

In order to mobilise support of the backward castes all the political parties, except Congress(I), made the implementation of Mandal Commission's recommendations a part of their election manifestos in 1989 Lok Sabha election. BJP promised not only the continuation of the reservation policy, but also reservation for

backward classes on the basis of Mandal Commission report.⁹ The Janata Dal leader V.P. Singh well understood the electoral arithmetic of castes and communities in U.P. and Bihar.¹⁰ So an appropriate electoral strategy suggested itself to him. The line up of intermediate castes with the newly formed Janata Dal — Thakurs, Jats, Yadavas and other farming communities — ensured that the march of Hindutvavadi consolidation would be stopped in its tracks.¹¹ It also provided a durable base from which the Janata Dal could expand out in all directions, utilising fully the Bofors-Submarin scandals and popular discontent against Rajiv Gandhi.¹² V.P. Singh did not ignore the backward caste votes of U.P. and Bihar for he realised that these votes could influence the outcome of election. Therefore he included the implementation of Mandal Commission report in Janata Dal's election manifesto in 1989.

In 1989 Lok Sabha election Congress(I) had lost majority. The party bagged 193 seats as against 410 seats in 1984 Lok Sabha election. The main reason for Congress(I)'s losing majority was the erosion in the backward classes vote bank of the party. For long, the myth had been held that the Muslims and Scheduled Castes vote "en bloc", "en masse", "like lemmings" for the Congress.¹³ Given the election 1989 results it appeared that new versions of vote bank ran as follows: In the South, where Rama Rao was unpopular, the Hindus, backward castes and Muslims constituted a vote bank

for the Congress, while in the North, where V.P. Singh ran and the Congress was perceived to be corrupt and communal, the Hindus, backward castes and Muslims vote went against the Congress. Moreover, in the North, the backward castes were influenced by the assurance of the implementation of Mandal Commission report by V.P. Singh.

While the Congress(I) based its election campaign on the protection of the rights of minorities, handing over real power to the Panchayats, stable governance and the unity of the country, it failed to include any welfare scheme for the backwards in its election campaign which caused the erosion in the backward castes vote bank of the party. Owing to this erosion in the party's backward castes vote bank the Congress(I) lost majority in the election 1989. In Rajasthan, of 7 reserved constituencies four (Sawai Madhopur-ST, Bayana - SC, Salumber - ST and Jalore - SC) went to BJP and the remaining (Ganganagar-SC, Banswara-ST and Tonk-SC) to Janata Dal.¹⁴ In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar also the Congress(I) lost the votes of backward castes. The Bahujan Samaj Party made inroads into the ruling party's two traditional vote banks — the backward castes and Muslims — and hammered in the final nail in the Congress(I)'s coffin.¹⁵ The BSP's 72 candidates got round 13 per cent of votes undercutting many Congressmen and even a few Janata Dal nominees.¹⁶ The clearest message was that every caste and community was furious with Congress(I)'s misrule and ineptitude. In Bihar, the factor which went against Congress(I) was the

consolidation of Rajput and Yadava votes in favour of Janata Dal.¹⁷ In caste ridden Bihar, the reason for the Rajput support for the Janata Dal was the projection of V.P. Singh as Prime Minister. Yadavas also constituted the backbone of the Janata Dal.¹⁸ In Bihar, the Congress(I) which bagged 48 out of 54 in 1984 won only 4 seats. The Janata Dal and BJP bagged 30 and 9 seats respectively.

The most significant outcome of the 1989 election was the rout of the ruling Congress(I) at the centre and the installation of V.P. Singh, leader of Janata Dal, which was an important component of the National Front, as the new Prime Minister in place of Rajiv Gandhi. But in the kind of political equations that emerged within the Lok Sabha, V.P. Singh actually presided over a minority government — the Janata Dal had a total membership of 141 in a house of 525 but was supported by BJP (88) and the left parties which accounted for a little over 45, apart from Telegu Desham, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and others who were totally opposed to Congress(I).

III

V.P. Singh's Announcement for Implementation of Mandal Commission Report.

After coming to power Prime Minister V.P. Singh assured that there would be a central government which could be expected to be more responsive to the needs and demands of the public. He said

that if the people had voted for a change, this must be reflected in programmes and policies pursued by the new Government. He further stated that when the nation looked forward to it was not a change in theoretical sense of the term, or just on paper, but in practice. Fighting corruption and implementation of Mandal Commission's recommendations were high on the agenda of the National Front Government.

The implementation of Mandal Commission's recommendations constituted an important element in the Janata Dal's election manifesto in 1989. In order to look afresh into the recommendations V.P. Singh appointed a sub committee in February 1990 which took six months to decide. On August 7, 1990, V.P. Singh announced in the Lok Sabha the implementation of 27 per cent reservation of jobs in Central Government services and Public Undertakings recommended by the Mandal Commission for socially and educationally backward classes. Making a suo moto statement in both Houses of Parliament on the Government's decision on the report of the Mandal Commission, Mr Singh said that such reservation of jobs for the socially and educationally backward classes (SEBs) was being made for the first time since independence.¹⁹ He ^{said} "I am happy today to announce in this August House a momentous decision of social justice that my Government has taken regarding the socially and educationally backward classes on the basis of the report of the Mandal Commission".²⁰ He pointed out the Constitution envisaged that the socially and educationally backward classes be identified,

their difficulties removed and their conditions improved in terms of Article 340(1) read with Article 15(4) as well as 16(4). It was a negation of basic structure of our Constitution that till now the requirement was not fulfilled. He added that "in accordance with our commitment before the people we included this in our Action Plan".²¹ After examining various aspects of it the Government had taken the following decisions on the Mandal Commission report:

1. Reservations would be based on castes. As V.P. Singh told the Parliament that "in order to avail ourselves of the benefits of the long experience of a number of states in preparing lists of socially and educationally backward classes and in order to ensure harmonious and quick implementation, we have decided to adopt in the first phase the castes common to both the Mandal list as well as the State lists".²²
2. The percentage of reservation for the socially and educationally backward classes would be 27 per cent.
3. The reservation would be applicable to services under the Government of India and Public Undertakings.

The Mandal Commission had been set up by the Morarji Desai Janata Government of 1977, probably as an offshoot of the analysis of Indira Gandhi's poll debacle, which proved that her overwhelming defeat was mainly brought about by en masse voting of the politically awakened backward classes.²³ Due to political

upheavals which beset the first non-Congress government at the Centre and the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections which followed in quick succession, the Mandal report was submitted only in December 1980 to Indira Gandhi.²⁴ Mrs Gandhi neither shelved the report nor did she accept it. Rather, she discreetly set aside and the opposition also equally judiciously let it remain on the shelf for the reason that they also felt uneasy handling it.²⁵

As Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1982 V.P. Singh had opted not to implement the Mandal report in the State. It was evident therefore that this new found empathy for the backward classes was motivated purely by political arithmetic and as a weapon to seize the political initiative from Devi Lal and all his other political opponents, for it would be political suicidal for any politician to come out against the report.²⁶ His announcement on August 7, 1990 — two days before Devi Lal's Kisan rally in New Delhi — that the Government would implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, was initially greeted as a master-stroke calculated to consolidate the backward castes as the new vote-bank of the Janata Dal.²⁷

That V.P. Singh was willy-nilly planting the seeds for a new political harvest became even more evident when he used the Red Fort as an electoral platform on Independence Day to reiterate his commitment to implementing Mandal Commission's recommendations, and appealed to the Scheduled Castes and Muslims by repeated

references to Ambedkar and declaring Prophet Mohammed's birthday — a public holiday.²⁸

IV

Impact of V.P. Singh's Announcement

The protests and demonstrations were started in different parts of the country following V.P. Singh's announcement to implement 27 per cent reservation of jobs for socially and educationally backward classes in the services of Central government and public undertakings. Soon after the announcement students took to the streets, blocking traffic, stoning vehicles, burning railway property and even gheraoing Ministers and senior officials. The students had never before got together to launch such a determined agitation. And the Government had never before appeared so helpless in the face of a popular agitation.

By August 14, 1990, a writ petition challenging the Central Government's decision to reserve 27 per cent jobs was filed by President of the All India Anti-Reservation Morcha, Ujjal Singh, before the Supreme Court. The petition stated that the Union Government's decision to implement the Mandal report by reserving 27 per cent of jobs for backward classes was only a political decision meant as a vote catching exercise. It was further pointed out that the reservation in favour of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the past 43 years had not brought about a general amelioration in their condition. The petitioner sought a stay order

on the implementation of Mandal Commission report. A similar writ petition was filed in the Allahabad High Court.

Delhi

Bandhs, rallies and demonstrations brought life in Delhi to a standstill. Students of Delhi University, which has not witnessed any political activity of any consequence in the last decade, were on the streets protesting against the Mandal report.²⁹ About 300 students gathered on August 11 at the Maurice Nagar Chowk to mobilise support for the anti-reservation movement. Maurice Nagar Chowk had been rechristened "Kranti Chowk" by the protesting students. Students from almost all the departments of Delhi University came on the roads to support the call "to boycott class" given by the Anti-Mandal Commission Forum.³⁰ Delhi University students burnt books and newspapers of August 8 — "an ominous day". Effigies of the Prime Minister and Mr B.P. Mandal, the progenitor of the Mandal Commission report were also burnt at the Kranti Chowk.³¹ The students took to car polishing and shoe shining in the Posh Connaught place and South Delhi trying to draw the people's attention to the Government's policy reserving 27 per cent jobs for the backward castes.³²

Mr G.K. Kaushik, member of Academic Council of Research Scholars, and Mr B. Raja Rajan, Vice President of Delhi University Researchers' Association (DURA) in a joint statement criticised the Government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations at a time when the nation was passing through a critical

stage.³³ They said that the "suo moto" decision of the Government was not only politically motivated but also ill-timed.³⁴ They observed that it would divide the nation on caste lines.

The National Forum of Teachers representing a section of Delhi University academicians described as "an act of self-preservation", the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations extending 27% job reservation to backward classes.³⁵ The Forum said that enhancement of reservation was only "a means to cover up failure in providing jobs and an admission of continuing bleak employment".³⁶ Several senior Professors of Delhi University came out with a statement on August 17 criticising the Government Policy on reservation which they feared would create divisions in our society.

The students' agitation in protest against the Mandal Commission report was all set to become a gigantic movement. On August 20 the students blocked the traffic at the busy ITO crossing in New Delhi for more than one hour. Earlier, hundreds of students mostly from Delhi University demonstrated in front of Door Darshan's Directorate-General's Office at Mandi House to protest against the "callous approach and the distorted picture" it was giving of the struggle of the students against a regime "out to divide the country on caste lines".³⁷ Later, the agitators gheraoed the Janata Dal member of Parliament,

Mr Sompal, who was attending a function at the Arts Faculty. Mr Sompal said that he supported the cause for which the students were fighting. He assured the students that he would raise the issue at different platforms, including the Parliament.

The Research Scholars Action Committee of Delhi University condemned the Government move to resort to reservations for teaching positions. They said that this would lead the country to "intellectual bankruptcy".³⁸ The students of Law Faculty in Delhi said that the Government should reconsider the Mandal Commission report because it would lead the country to class and caste war.

24 August was a day of spectacular protests all over Delhi. Most of the 10,000-odd students had assembled on the lawns of the Boat Club on the morning of that day. They were determined to form a "human chain" around Parliament as a mark of protest against the Government's decision to accept the Mandal Commission report.³⁹ The administration was also prepared in full force to tackle the situation. The Parliament was cordoned off, and when the students attempted to march towards the Lok Sabha, the police armed with canes, shields and tear gas, chased them away. There was total confusion everywhere and the cops had to burst as many as 50 tear gas shells on Parliament Street to disperse the crowds.⁴⁰ In another incident, hundreds of students of Deshbandhu College in South Delhi fought a pitched battle with the police for over an hour.⁴¹

The employees of Reserve Bank and Bank of India came out on the Parliament Street in support of the demonstrators. The All India Reserve Bank Employees' Congress demanded the immediate withdrawal of the implementation of the Mandal Commission report. The Mazdoor Ekta Commission, Gulmohar Park, while expressing solidarity with the agitating students described the Mandal Commission as "Bundle Commission" and warned the Government that if the report was implemented, the Government might have to reap the whirlwind of mass upsurge against it.⁴²

Meanwhile, 68 teachers of Delhi University in a joint statement supported the Government for implementing the recommendations of Mandal Commission. Some of the signatories to the statement included Mr T.M. Thomas, member, Executive Council, Mr Harmohinder Singh, member, Academic Council and Dr A.N.Roy and Nalini Taneja, Members, DUTA Executive Committee. Participants at a pro-reservation meeting also welcomed the centre's decision to reserve 27% jobs in the government service for the backward classes and asked the Government to implement its decision even in the face of pressures.⁴³ Meeting under the auspices of the "Socialist Forum" they felt that reservation was necessary to ensure that the backward classes got their due which was denied to them for centuries.⁴⁴

The Anti-Mandal Commission Forum called the Mandal report a "farce in the name of social justice, a slap in the face of

education and merit, a vote-catching measure based on censuses taken in 1891 and 1931 and misuse of power by the minority government".⁴⁵ University students, teachers and Karmachari leaders formed an "Equality Front" on August 25 to carry out the agitation programme against the Mandal Commission report. The first resolution that the Front adopted was to call for "Delhi Bandh" on August 27. In a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr R.K. Hooda, Chairman of All India Young Farmers' Conference regretted that an attempt was being made to give reservation to only one section on caste lines at a time when a large section of the population was backward. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Delhi Parishad, in a statement called upon the student community to expose thoroughly the politics of Central Government which sought to divide the country on caste lines in order to take political mileage out of it.⁴⁶ Hundreds of teachers and researchers of Delhi University appealed to the President and the Prime Minister in a signed memorandum on August 28 to stay the implementation of the Mandal Commission report until there was a national consensus on the issue.

The most significant event was the joint show of strength by farmers and students on 4 September at the Boat Club. At least 10,000 people turned up to denounce the Mandal Commission. Jeans and dhotis, cigarettes and hookas, sneakers and jootis, mingled together on the lawns as the Tikait-led Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) supporters joined the students of Delhi University in this "fight to finish".⁴⁷ The star speaker was the BKU Vice President

Captain Bhopal Singh who declared that the students, like the farmers, should be ready for any sacrifice in the cause of justice.⁴⁸ He said, "Farmers will not allow Parliamentarians and legislators to enter the villages if the centre does not withdraw the Mandal Commission".⁴⁹ The rally organised by the Anti-Mandal Commission Forum, was also addressed by the Panther Party President, Bhim Singh, who asked the Government to refrain from taking recourse to divide and rule policy popularised by the British.⁵⁰

As the anti-reservation stir spread, supporters of Mandal proposals warned that the salient majority — composed allegedly of those backwards who would benefit from reservation — would strike back.⁵¹ A Pro-reservation rally called in New Delhi by the two Union Ministers — Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan — drew only 2,000 persons though the organisers had expected a crowd that ran into lakhs. While addressing the rally Paswan said: "People get married on the basis of caste, but when we talk of reservations they say that we are breaking the country. These anti-reservationists talk about dividing the country on the basis of caste, but everything is computed on the basis of caste anyway".⁵²

Violent protesters brought life in the capital to a stand still. People had to trudge long distances to reach offices where attendance remained thin. Scores of buses were damaged as they became the target of student fury. Even school students joined

in the stir and police resorted to lathi charge at several places to keep them off the road.⁵³ The Government, not wishing to take any risk, had ordered the closure of all the schools in the capital for a month. The Universities had also been advised to close down. In getting the Universities closed the obvious purpose of the Government was to ensure that the hostellers, who had been in the forefront of the agitation, left for their homes. But in this the Government had not succeeded. On the campuses the students of the backward classes, who were in a minority, had preferred to remain silent in the presence of a vocal majority who opposing reservations said that a new caste-consciousness had emerged amongst them since the Government decision had been announced. A student from Orissa at JNU said, "Earlier we never stopped to think about the caste of our friends. But now we are making inquiries, albeit in hushed tones, about the caste of all those we know on the campus".⁵⁴

Bihar

V.P. Singh's announcement had sparked off violence in Patna, where anti-reservationists stopped trains, burnt buses and hurled bombs.⁵⁵ Patna erupted in flames as soon as the T.V. bulletin on 7 August declared that the Centre would implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission extending 27% reservation. Youths took over the streets in protest against the Government's decision and brought life to a standstill. The following day, the students of the Patna University, hotbed of students' activities, went on

the rampage.⁵⁶ The office of the Vice-Chancellor was ransacked and the number of buildings set on fire. Trouble soon spread to other educational institutions. The Patna administration ordered the closure of all the schools and colleges of the capital city and the police were ordered to vacate the hostels.

The anti-reservationists in Bihar attacked government offices and railway property. They also attacked ministers and senior officials. Trains approaching Patna station were stoned and several bogies set on fire. In some parts of the State, the agitationists blew up railway tracks, throwing the State's transport system completely out of gear.⁵⁷ And on 13 August the police fired on a group of students in Madhubani, killing one of them.⁵⁸

The Bihar Chief Minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, blamed Congress(I) leaders for creating caste hatred over the issue. Condemning the violence, he said the nature of disturbances fully exposed the ugly nexus between hooligans and vested political interests opposed to Janata Dal.⁵⁹ He convened an all-Party meeting at the State Secretariat and issued a joint appeal to the people of the State to rethink the issue, remain calm and desist from escalating violence.⁶⁰

The issue had also split political parties in Bihar along caste lines. Though the Congress(I) continued to pay lip service to the Mandal report, former Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra had taken an anti-Mandal posture. But this did not stop the Congress(I)

deputy leader in the Assembly, Ramalakhan Singh Yadav, from describing V.P. Singh as the "messiah of the backwards" at a pro-reservation rally.⁶¹ Several legislators said in a joint statement that the decision to implement the Mandal Commission report was grossly unfair and went against the interests of the entire nation.⁶²

The anti-reservation stir in Bihar took a new turn on August 22 when the Harijan Adivasi Vikas Sangh threatened to launch a country-wide agitation if the Government went ahead with its decision to reserve 27% jobs for backward classes. The leaders of the Sangh condemned what they called a conspiracy by the Janata Dal leaders to adjust 90 more castes in the list for Harijans and Adivasis eligible for reservation benefits.⁶³ Supporting the country-wide anti-reservation agitation, Mr Bilal Paswan Bihangam, the leader of Harijan Adivasi Vikas Sangh, suggested the implementation of Karpoori Thakur formula for reservation of jobs. He suggested that 10 per cent government jobs be reserved for economically poor, 6 per cent for women and 5 per cent for the poor belonging to the minorities.⁶⁴

While the anti-reservationists came on the streets protesting against Central Government's job quota policy, the Bihar Janata Dal welcomed it and condemned the anti-reservation agitation in different parts of the country. In a resolution, adopted in a meeting of the party M.Ps, legislators and State as well as district party functionaries in Patna, it was said that the Centre's

decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission was a "historic step in the decision to provide opportunities to the oppressed and suppressed classes".⁶⁵

The Laloo Prasad Government sought assistance of its Jharkhand allies, particularly the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, to crush the anti-reservation movement in South Bihar. Consequently the entire South Bihar was threatened with direct clashes between JMM cadres and the anti-reservationists. The All-Jharkhand Students Union leaders organised a meeting at the Albert Ekka Chowk in Ranchi on August 22 giving warning to the anti-reservationists to desist from indulging in violence over the reservation policy. But totally ignoring the threats of JMM and AJSU, the anti-reservationists had been making the government's establishments their main targets.

So angry were the Bihar's upper castes that an organisation called the Rastriya Swarna Mukti Morcha (national upper caste liberation front) had been set up in Bhumihar-dominated Muzaffarpur district to demand a separate "Swarna Rajya" (upper caste State) comprising areas in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Haryana.⁶⁶ The Morcha had issued an ultimatum to the Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, to either withdraw the reservation policy by September 15 or face the consequences of the struggle for "Swarna Rajya".⁶⁷

The anti-reservation stir in Bihar took a violent turn on 24 September when the agitators ignoring heavy rain gathered in Patna for a massive rally. The Police asked the students to disperse as they were violating prohibitory orders. Instead the students broke the police cordon, throwing stones and brickbats. As the agitators became violent, the police went berserk and in two hour long pitched battle, no less than 30 rounds were fired and as many as 125 tear gas shells were used. Four students died in the battle. The students, however, alleged that at least eleven had been killed.

Even in mid-October the situation remained tense with Pro-reservationists getting massive support from V.P. Singh's rally at Gandhi Maidan on October 8, 1990.⁶⁸

Orissa

In Orissa, the anti-reservation agitation had become the first major state-wide students' stir after the 1964 movement that brought down the Government of the then Chief Minister Biren Mitra. The anti-reservation stir in the State caused great damage to government property, delayed trains and disrupted normal life. The credibility of the six-month old Biju Patnaik Government suffered a loss of prestige. The Chief Minister, Biju Patnaik, announced after the occurrence of much violence in the State that the Mandal Commission report would not be implemented in Orissa because it was "full of errors". He accused Prime Minister V.P.

Singh of "playing caste politics for getting votes".⁶⁹

Biju Patnaik was deeply worried over the anti-reservation agitation at different places in the State, particularly at Bhubaneswar, where it had turned violent. Moreover, the agitation started initially as anti-quota issue alone soon developed into anti-government agitation in general. The students and Lawyers of Bhubaneswar had raised slogans like "death to the mad government" and the students of Rajdhani College had burnt the effigy of the Chief Minister.⁷⁰

In order to suppress the student agitation Biju Patnaik initiated stern administrative measures and ordered the police to deal with the students firmly in Bhubaneswar, where the stir was launched. The police, therefore, went on a rampage, entering the colleges and mercilessly beating up the students and the college staff.

The Cuttack students soon took the cue from their Bhubaneswar agitation, paralysing the State's premier city's normal life and disrupting the movement of trains and bringing the traffic on the Calcutta-Madras national highway (No.5) to a halt for days together.⁷¹ The reports from other parts of the State also suggested that the movement was catching on and acquiring a state character. What was more, the students began protesting against the police atrocities as well.⁷² Five persons were killed and three injured on September 1 when the police opened fire at Nirakarpur and Balugaon in Puri

district as the anti-reservation agitation in Orissa took a more violent turn.⁷³ The Railway Protection Force opened fire at Nirakarpur after lathi-charge and teargas failed to disperse the agitators who detained trains, set ablaze an engine and prevented fire tenders from reaching the spot.⁷⁴ At Balugaon the police opened fire when the demonstrators attacked the police station stabbing the officer-in-charge and another officer.⁷⁵

Rather than allowing his opponents to get upper hand, Biju patnaik decided to perform a volte-face and wrote a letter to V.P. Singh on August 28 suggesting that there should be an income ceiling and that the quotas should be maintained only for recruitment and not for promotions. At a Press Conference on August 29 he denounced the Mandal Commission report and announced that he was not implementing the report in Orissa. But his turn around came a little too late, for the students had no signs of relenting and the agitation continued despite his assurance.

The agitation, which rocked the Biju Patnaik Government, had not been confined to anti-quota issue alone. There was growing resentment among the people over the Government's failures on all fronts which had also influenced the agitators. The Janata Dal Government had done little to solve the problems of the increasing prices of essential commodities and employment.

West Bengal

As the anti-reservation agitations were reported from seven educational institutions in West Bengal, the Confederation of Other Backward Castes, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities of West Bengal demanded immediate implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations in the State. The Confederation criticized the State Government for not having published a list identifying the backward classes as yet.⁷⁶ It thanked the National Front Government for keeping its election pledge to implement the Mandal report.

In Calcutta, the students had come out in open defiance of the CPI(M) student wing, the SFI. They boycotted classes, took out processions and staged demonstrations in college campuses.⁷⁷ The SFI leaders were taken by surprise when a large section of students of Economics Department of Calcutta University at the B.T. Road Campus boycotted classes and staged demonstration inside the college campus on August 23. A spokesman of the students criticised the reservation policy of the Central Government as based on class considerations. The SFI leaders could never imagine that the reservation issue would also affect the students in left front ruled West Bengal. Not only was the SFI's reflex show, but its reaction to the student's outburst on the Mandal Commission report was practicable. Mr Tapas Bose, the SFI State President described the entire episode as "insignificant" and argued that "most of the students in the campus had not involved in the agitation at the B.T. Road Campus."⁷⁸

However, within a few days the students of Jadavpur University, Presidency College, Scottish Church College, St. Xavier's College, Lady Brabourne, Ashutosh, Dum Dum Motijheel Colleges boycotted their classes in protest against the reservation policy of the National Front Government. The students of Jadavpur University formed Anti-Mandal Commission Forum. In a letter to the Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, the Forum stated that this policy formulated "with an eye to vote bank" would "aggravate social tensions and promote mediocrity".⁷⁹ Students of Shibpur Bengal Engineering College polished shoes, drove rickshaws and cleaned the campus to protest against the Centre's reservation policy.⁸⁰

It was only after this that the SFI leaders and the State CPI(M) took serious note of the agitations which they had earlier dismissed as insignificant. The Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, who had even a fortnight ago lent his support to the reservation policy of National Front Government, changed his view and came down heavily on the centre and advocated a "realistic view of the situation instead of a hasty step for political gains".⁸¹ He said that job applicants in West Bengal would be deprived if the Mandal Commission recommendation of 27 per cent job reservation for backward classes on community basis was implemented. He observed that there was no community-based backward class in West Bengal and urged the centre to ensure that job seekers in West Bengal were not deprived in any way.⁸² Mr Basu pointed out that "we can not create any new backward class just to help them take advantage".⁸³ He

said : "we will not accept any discrimination against West Bengal".⁸⁴

Mr Benoy Chowdhury, the West Bengal Minister for Land and Land Reforms, pleaded for a rational and scientific policy of reservation for the backward class.⁸⁵ He emphasised economic and educational upliftment of the backward classes. He said that reservation of jobs would not eliminate the disparities prevailing in the present society without any change in the socio-economic and cultural position. To him, job reservation had not yielded any good results for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. 95 per cent of them had failed to draw any benefit from the system and had on the contrary created a privileged class.⁸⁶

In the meanwhile, the Gorkha National Students' Front (GNSF) in Darjeeling had opposed the Mandal Commission recommendations to reserve seats on the basis of caste. Mr Ashoke Chettri, Vice President of the GNSF, accused the Centre of trying to "garner the votes of the backward classes by dividing the nation on caste lines".⁸⁷ He said that instead of playing casteist politics, the Government should provide financial assistance to the poor for better education.⁸⁸ A number of Nepalese ethnic groups, on the other hand, demanded Scheduled Tribes status or backward class status.

Assam

The reservation issue had also hit Assam. Tempers ran high between pro- and anti-reservationists in Guwahati which witnessed noisy demonstrations and road blockades. While the anti-reservation lobby was led by the "Equality Forum" and a section of engineering and medical students, the United Reservation Movement Council of Assam superheaded the pro-reservation campaign, vowing to secure the implementation of the Mandal report. The members of "Equality Forum" demanded "exclusion of privileges on the basis of caste and communities"⁸⁹. A spokesman of the Forum said : "Our crusade against the implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations will continue and we shall go to any extent within democratic norms to get this evil scapped"⁹⁰. Hundreds of the United Reservation Movement Council, on the other hand, staged a dharna on the busy Guwahati-Shillong road, near the State Secretariat on September 10, seeking the total implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations.⁹¹ It claimed that Mandal Commission's recommendations be implemented in political and educational spheres also.⁹² The Council also wanted the inclusion of religious and linguistic minorities in Assam in the OBC list and fulfilment of the quota backlog for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.⁹³

Uttar Pradesh

The fires of the anti-reservation stir in Uttar Pradesh had consumed at least 26 districts. While 15 of the districts including Allahabad, Varanasi, Ghaziabad, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut,

Nainital, Kanpur, Gazipur, Gorakhpur, Basti, Deoria, Jhansi and Lucknow had been the worst affected and had come under "the highly sensitized stir-prone zone", 11 districts had been identified as areas with less potential for trouble.⁹⁴

Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, Chief Minister of U.P. , backed the Mandal Commission report firstly because it had been sanctioned by the National Front Government and secondly because he tried to emerge as the messiah of the backward castes in the region. Since his coming to power, the undercurrents of a caste war were already visible as many of the upper caste officers had been upset over the transfer from lucrative posts in favour of officers from the backward castes.⁹⁵ Mr Yadav had been trying to woo the backwards and Muslims. The implementation of the Mandal Commission report had sent shock waves through the upper caste communities who had come out on the streets to protest against the Government decision.⁹⁶

In the State capital, Lucknow University students, who declared August 9 as a "black day", wore black bands, took out processions, shouted anti-government slogans, besides burning an effigy of the Prime Minister and a copy of the Mandal Commission report.⁹⁷ The student leaders had also constituted Mandal Ayog Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti. The students of Banaras Hindu University burnt their degrees, marksheets and examination forms.⁹⁸

In the face of continuing violence all the State Universities and 350 degree colleges had been closed. In Lucknow, the students polished shoes and cleaned cars and took out processions in which

they plied rickshaws -- to make the point that this was what they were likely to end up doing if the Government reserved more jobs. But Yadav seemed completely unconcerned about their fate. On one occasion he said : "There should be more reservation than what is suggested in the report. Only a handful of people are feeling bad and our government is not bothered about them".⁹⁹ Moreover, he egged on the backwards saying "come out and fight these anti-reservationists on the streets".¹⁰⁰

Kanpur was the centre of student politics in the State. On August 19 a powerful bomb exploded at Chuniganj Police Station, injuring five people. The other target of the agitators was the Kidwainagar branch of the Punjab National Bank. Like Kanpur, Allahabad too^{was} a nerve-centre of students' movements. The police came down with a heavy hand to deal with the situation. On Independence Day, students of the Allahabad University hoisted a black flag.¹⁰² Later, when they brought out a procession, the police allegedly beat them up with lathis, forcing the protestors to retreat to their hostels.¹⁰³

In Nainital, the students of Patnagar University set two jeeps belonging to the institution ablaze and set up road blocks in Maldwani, Nainital and Maaali. Soon government jeeps and buses were attacked.¹⁰⁴ The railways were singled out for attack in Lucknow. The agitators ransacked the computerised reservation office at Badshahnagar Station and its computers were destroyed. On 4 September, four railway bogies were burnt down in Gorakhpur, two in Deoria and one in Siddharthnagar.¹⁰⁵ In Jhansi, the agitating

students attacked the houses of railway officials, ransacked the railway station and set fire to a parcel godown, resulting in destruction of goods worth Rs. 50 lakhs.¹⁰⁶

The attacks culminated in the gutting of the Meerut Cantonment railway station on 7 September. A group of students doused the station master's office and adjoining rooms with petrol and set them on fire, to register their protest against the Raja's move.¹⁰⁷

The militant elements of the student unions of various Universities got together to form what they called 'commando forces' to stoke the blaze even further.¹⁰⁸ In Lucknow, on 2 September, they lobbed a crude bomb into the power transformer of the State guest house, located in the heart of the city. Fortunately, however, the police diffused the bomb in time, and no grave damage was inflicted.¹⁰⁹ On the same day, the 'commandos' hurled a bomb at the residence of the Vice-Chancellor of Banaras Hindu University.¹¹⁰

On 3 September, a mob of about 1,500 marched towards the police station in Salampur town, after damaging two police vans and setting fire to a couple of buses belonging to the State transport Corporation. Unable to control the procession, the police opened fire, killing one and injuring many.¹¹¹

Despite violent protests against the Mandal Commission report in Uttar Pradesh it was implemented in the State's services.

In this respect, Uttar Pradesh was the first State to implement the Mandal report. Moreover, the ban imposed on December 1988 by the Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav, on the recruitment in the government serives had been withdrawn with immediate effect clearing decks for giving 27 per cent of the jobs to the backward classes.¹¹² The reservation quota for Scheduled Castes was 18 per cent and for Scheduled Tribes 2 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. While raising quota to 27 per cent, all the 55 backward castes and classes identified by the State Government on August 20, 1977 who were earlier allowed 15 per cent reservation had been kept in tact. Thus the total reservation in Uttar Pradesh was jacked up from 35 per cent to 62 per cent. The Mandal Commission had identified 116 castes as backward in Uttar Pradesh. Out of 55 castes which enjoyed reservation benefit, 53 were common to both the State Government and the Mandal Commission lists. The two castes, Kamboj and Jhohojā, which were in the U.P. list, were not in the Mandal list.

Mr Kailash Nath Singh, M.P. and President of Uttar Pradesh Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, demanded that the 27 per cent reservation should be extended to all educational and vocational institutions, otherwise the benefit of reservations would not reach to the needy.¹¹³

The Muslims, who constituted the most educationally and economically backward community in Uttar Pradesh, were the main losers because there was no provision for reservation for the

Muslims in the Mandal Commission report and it was only the Juhlaia (weavers) community which fell under reservation quota. The Muslim leaders felt that the basis for reservation should be economic. The Indian Muslim Youth Conference President, Mr M. A. Naqvi, demanded 35% reservation for the Muslims in the country. He said that if reservation facility was not extended to Muslims, then he would give a call to the 200 million Muslim population in the country to openly participate in the on going anti-reservation agitation.¹¹⁴

Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh witnessed self-immolation bids and there was curfew in Gwalior when a youth Akhilesh Pandey suffered 50 per cent burns after setting himself ablaze.¹¹⁵ The Madhya Pradesh Government has not been able to formulate a new policy on reservations in the light of the Central Government's stand on the Mandal Commission report. The Chief Minister, Mr Sunderlal Patwa, said that his Government would stick to the manifesto of the BJP which said that while abiding by the Constitutional provision of providing reservations to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes it would endorse the implementation of Mandal Commission report conditionally.¹¹⁶ Mr Patwa wanted reservations which should not exceed 50 per cent as suggested by the Supreme Court. He said that his Government found many anomalies in the Mandal Commission report in the context of the conditions prevailing in Madhya Pradesh.¹¹⁷

Himachal Pradesh

The Mandal bomb had also exploded in peaceful State Himachal Pradesh. Simla, Nahan, Dhramshala and the beautiful Kangra Valley were engulfed in flames and the army had to stage flag marches and assist the civil administration between anti- and pro-reservationists.¹¹⁸ Finally, on September 6 the Himachal Pradesh Cabinet decided not to implement the Mandal Commission report in its present form and instead, to widen the scope of 'Autodaya Scheme' for the uplift of educationally and economically backward classes.¹¹⁹ The Cabinet, at its meeting in Simla under the Chairmanship of the State Chief Minister, Mr Shanta Kumar, decided that barring the facilities available at present to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, no more facilities would be allowed in future on a caste basis.¹²⁰ Mr Kumar claimed that Himachal Pradesh was the first State in the country to adopt a rational decision on the Mandal Commission report. He appealed to the State Government employees, who were in the forefront of the agitation, to call off the agitation, so as to avoid inconvenience to the public and loss of government property. The State Government employees, however, turned down the appeal of the Chief Minister, calling it "political statement of a politician".¹²¹

The struggle against the quota system was not new in Himachal Pradesh. In the late seventies, the employees formed a Non-Scheduled Castes and Tribes Services Welfare Association

and took up with the Government all their grievances. The Organisation also filed cases in the administrative Tribunal, challenging the suppression of non-Scheduled Castes and Tribes employees by junior employees from the reserved categories.¹²²

The reservation in Himachal Pradesh was already 53 per cent including 15 per cent reservation for IRDP families. The employees claimed that reservation would go upto 95 per cent if the Government accepted the Mandal Commission report.

Students opposed to reservation had taken to the streets in most major towns of Himachal Pradesh. Schools and Colleges as well as all the three Universities in the State, at Simla, Palampur and Solar were closed.¹²³ The students were not united on the reservation issue. The Students Federation of India (SFI) which had a solid base in the student community all over the State, did not support the anti-reservation agitation and the ABVP, following the instances from the BJP high command, was not active any more in leading the agitation. However, the anti-reservation agitation supported by the Congress(I) under the banner of the NSUI looked quite strong and determined.

The stir in Himachal Pradesh took a significant dimension when the anti-reservationists demanded the scrapping of even the existing 22.5 per cent reservation for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Till September 9, 1990 the situation in the State was tense as normal life remained paralysed on account of the indefinite strike

by government officials and public sector employees protesting against the report.¹²⁴ The anti-reservation agitation had fizzled out only when the dominant faction of the employees' leadership had decided to suspend the agitation after an agreement with the State Government on their main demands, including review of the present reservation policy.

Punjab

The State administration in Punjab had been paralysed by the anti-reservation agitation. The agitation which started from the Government Medical College, Amritsar, had spread throughout the State. Educational institutions including Universities and professional colleges were closed. The agitation, however, did not take a violent turn in Punjab. The protest was even more muted as the Government announced that it would leave it to a popular government to decide on implementing the report and because the various Akali and militant groups seemed unable to take a stand on the issue.¹²⁵ Unlike in Haryana, the anti-reservation stir had failed to penetrate into the rural areas and it continued to be an urban middle class phenomenon.¹²⁶

In fact, the Akali Dal (Mann) and Dr Sohan Singh's Panthic Committee had condemned the anti-reservation stir and extended full support to the Dalits. The Panthic Committee asked the students not to join the stir. While Akali Dal (Mann) came with a stand on the reservation issue, other Akali factions remained silent.

The anti-reservationists in Punjab formed a state-level body to coordinate the agitation. Meanwhile, the Indian Minorities and Dalit Front headed by Balwant Singh Tohra thanked the militants for opposing the anti-reservation agitation and said that it would promote the legitimate interests of the Dalits. The Front said it was for the first time that the militant organisations had supported the Dalits in conformity with the ideology of Guru Govind Singh who made supreme sacrifices for Dalits.

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Mr Pritam Singh Bhatti, President of All India Backward Classes and Scheduled Castes Confederation had written to the President, the Prime Minister and many Union Ministers congratulating them for implementation of the Mandal Commission report. He also condemned the role played by the leader of the opposition, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, Organisations like RSS, Arya Samaj and Shiv Sena who, he alleged, were aiding and abetting the anti-reservation stir. Mr Bhatti regretted that the report of the first Backward Classes Commission named as Kaka Kalelkar Commission, which was submitted to the Government of India on March 31, 1955, was not implemented due to political reasons. He appealed to the Sikh leaders to extend cooperation to the Union Government in implementing the Mandal Commission report as the backward classes had been exploited for centuries.

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The Communist Party of India in Punjab urged the Government to take steps to implement the Mandal Commission report, bring about structural changes and implement the promises of making

employment and education, fundamental rights.¹³¹ The Party executive at its meeting in Chandigarh on September 8 recommended 10-15 per cent reservation for economically weaker sections of upper castes, reservation for women, fixing upper income ceiling for getting reservation benefits in the Bihar Pattern and priority to merit apart from reservation in promotions.¹³² The CPI also called upon all right thinking people to whole heartedly support the reservation policy which aimed at doing away with the age old and inhuman prejudices, discriminations and injustices against a large section of the society and ensure their fuller participation in administration and social life.¹³³

Haryana

While in Punjab the anti-reservation stir did not take a violent turn, Haryana witnessed far more trouble (road and rail blockades, violent clashes) possibly because the State Government was not exactly averse to fomenting it.¹³⁴ Chief Minister Hukum Singh — a Chantala Protege — welcomed the implementation of the Mandal Commission report but then in an obvious attempt to embarrass the Union Government, appointed a Backward Classes Commission.¹³⁵ He claimed to be done so because deputations of many communities, including Jats, Jat-Sikhs, Ahirs, Gujjars, Sainis, Rodes and Moos, had complained that despite being socially and economically backward, they had not been included in the list of beneficiaries.¹³⁶ The move was a blatant attempt to declare the entire agricultural community in Haryana backward.¹³⁷

Haryana had 10 per cent quota in government services on the basis of the estimated population of the backward classes. The State Government had identified 66 backward castes as against 76 castes identified by the Mandal Commission. While Gujars, Sainis and Ahirs had been recognised as backward by the Mandal Commission, these castes did not figure in the Haryana list. Jats did not figure as backward either in the Mandal list or in the State list.

Rajasthan

The anti-reservation agitation in Rajasthan had spread to many cities including Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner and Udaipur. The students of the medical college and some Higher Secondary institutions boycotted their classes and came out on the roads to block the traffic.¹³⁸ The anti-reservationists demanded reservation on economic basis.

The people of Rajasthan rejected the Prime Minister's decision in a manner that threatened to upset Mr V.P. Singh's calculations of a populist measure. Out of 142 municipal bodies in the State where elections were held on August 27, Mr V.P. Singh's Janata Dal won only 10 despite being a partner in the State coalition Government.¹³⁹

In Rajasthan 28% vacancies in the State government and its corporations were already reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The reservation would exceed 50 per cent of the total

vacancies if the other backward classes were given 27 per cent reservations, as recommended by the Mandal Commission. Moreover, the list prepared by the Mandal Commission in respect of backward classes did not tally with the list of the State Government. While the Mandal Commission listed 140 castes as other backward classes, the list prepared by the State Government comprised 57 castes.

The BJP Chief Minister, Mr Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, supported the reservation policy of the Union Government and warned the agitators against indulging in violence. He asked the State M.Ps and MIAs to ensure that there was no caste or class struggle in their constituencies.

However, the stir did not abate and agitations spread to Kota, Alwar, Bharatpur, Sanganer and many other places. The alleged threat of firm action by the police did not deter the anti-reservationists who warned the government against its divide-and-rule policy.¹⁴⁰ The stir continued till mid-October when it was overtaken by the Rath Yatra — communal uprisings.

Gujrat

The anti-reservation agitation had neither fury nor the intensity of the movement that Gujrat witnessed over the issue in 1981 and 1985.¹⁴¹ This was mainly because the Chief Minister, Mr Chimanbhai Patel, was perceived as the representative of the landed Patel community who would be outraged if job quotas were

increased for the backward communities. He further strengthened this belief by extending the term of the Justice Mankand Commission, appointed in 1985 to review the reservation policy.

There was also no strong demand from the leaders of the backward communities to enhance the quota as they knew too well that neither Mr Patel nor the BJP, which was a coalition partner in the state ministry, would accept such a demand. ¹⁴²

The Baxi Commission in 1980 had identified 82 socially and educationally backward communities which enjoyed job reservation of 10 per cent in the State Government. The then Chief Minister, Mr Madhavsingh Solanki had appointed the Justice Rane Commission and used its as yet unpublished report to enhance the reservation quota from 10 to 28 per cent. This led to a violent agitation in the State which had thrown Mr Solanki who had emerged as a messiah of the backward communities out of power. The new Chief Minister, Mr Amarsingh Chaudhary, promptly withdrew Mr Solanki's notification and set up the Justice Mankand Commission to advise the government on further course of action. Mr Chaudhary extended the term of the Commission twice because he did not wish to get involved in any controversy. Mr Patel also extended the term of the Commission because he knew that if the report was submitted it would lead to strident demands for and against enhancing quota.

However, well past the second week of October seven incidents of self-immolation bid had been reported from Gujrat and the Chief Minister said that the Government should not remain passive in the face of such acts. ¹⁴³ He along with the Orissa Chief Minister, Mr Biju Patnaik, asked the Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, to clarify that the Mandal Commission recommendations would not be imposed on the States. Armed with this clarification Mr Patel summoned a meeting of 200 student leaders in Ahmedabad on September 2 and told them that there was no cause for them to agitate any more. ¹⁴⁴ He announced that his Government would neither implement the Mandal Commission report nor enhance the job quota for backward communities, whatever might be the implementations of the Mankand Commission.

What had baffled the backward communities most was the silence maintained by the Congress(I) leaders, especially Mr Madhavsinh Solanki who had earlier committed to raising the quota. Mr Pasaji Thakore, a member of backward community said: "How can we expect Chimanbhai to do things for us if even ¹⁴⁵ Madhavsinh is keeping mum?"

Members of the backward communities believed that the present rulers, including the BJP and Mr Chimanbhai Patel were the main forces behind the anti-reservation stir in 1985. The agitation leader, Mr Sankarbai Patel, openly acknowledged the support he received from them at that time. He claimed that the Chief Minister had assured him that the quota would not be increased. But many

believed that Mr Sankarbhai Patel was actually working for the Chief Minister who needed an excuse of an agitation to avoid enhancing the reservation quota.

With the debacle of the Congress (I) in the Assembly election of 1989, the other backward castes in Gujrat were left without effective representation. Though there were several MLAs from these communities in the BJP, they were a voiceless lot as the Party was controlled by upper caste leaders. Mr Surendra Makwana, a disgruntled youth leader of the backward community said: "The stark reality is that Gujrat is under upper caste rule. The weaker section must brace themselves for a long inning of suffering".¹⁴⁶ The backward communities were a helpless lot because their leaders in the Congress (I) were defeated while the ruling Parties — the Janata Dal and the BJP — did not take up their cause.

Maharashtra

Maharashtra was one of the few States untouched by the violent opposition to the Mandal Commission report. Balram Jakhar, former Lok Sabha Speaker, and Shiv Sena Chief Bal Thackeray were the only prominent politicians who attacked the Mandal report. Mr Balram Jakhar said that the decision to implement the Mandal Commission report would cost the nation dearly and it would not serve the deprived sections of the society but would only lead

to caste war. According to him, the decision "is fraught with vested interests and intended to throw dust into the eyes of the people".¹⁴⁷ He alleged that the National Front Government had failed in every area and was "busy paralysing the nation and the Government", playing havoc with the economy.¹⁴⁸ Mr Bal Thakeray said: "What is this mandal-bandal? It is an election stunt. If the Mandal report is capable of providing more employment opportunities to the backward castes, I will support it. But this is not going to be the case. It is only an eye wash; an advance notice for the elections".¹⁴⁹

The South

While the Centre's decision to implement Mandal Commission report had set the northern part of India a fire, the reactions to the decisions in the South had been subdued.

Tamil Nadu

As Mr V.P. Singh was pilloried for the decision of his National Front Government to implement the recommendations of Mandal Commission on backward classes, the Tamil Nadu Government presented him a shield in appreciation of the bold step.¹⁵⁰ Mr Karunanidhi, the Chief Minister of TamilNadu, expressing his gratitude, said Mg Singh's act was culmination of a long struggle against discrimination of backward classes launched by Ambedkar and Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, and pointed out that Krishna, worshipped by devout Hindus, and Valmiki author of Ramayana,

belonged to backward classes.¹⁵¹

The DMK Government of Mr Karunanidhi was the the first in the country to convene the Assembly to pass a resolution thanking the Prime Minister for having taken "the revolutionary decision of giving effect to social justice".¹⁵² Miss Jayalalitha, the AIADMK General Secretary, was, however, disappointed that the reservation was only 27 per cent as the MGR, the founder of her party, had achieved a 50 per cent reservation for the backward classes in the state services a decade ago.¹⁵³ There was no question of the State Unit of Congress(I) going against the move as it was Mr Kamraj who had not only championed the cause of the backward people but carved out a most backward class from among them and extended educational facilities to it.¹⁵⁴

Though there had not been even a whimper of protest in public in Tamil Nadu, the Chief Minister, Mr Karunanidhi, had been going round delivering fiery speeches in defence of the Mandal Commission report. In his speeches, Mr Karunanidhi cautioned the anti-reservationists that volcanoes would erupt if there was any attempt to alter or modify the recommendations implemented by the National Front Government.¹⁵⁵ He called upon the backward caste people to unite against the opponents of the Mandal Commission report.

Tamil Nadu had reason to celebrate the implementation of Mandal Commission report by the centre for it was here that the

Justice Party Government led by Mr Muthiah Mudaliar, as a result of anti-Brahmin movement, granted quotas for different communities as far as 1927. Quotas were also enhanced by a Government Order in 1947 for Scheduled Castes and other backward communities. The Government Order, popularly known as the Communal G.O., was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1950. This led to such an agitation throughout the State launched by the Dravidar Kazhagam of Ramaswamy Naicker, progenitor of the DMK and the AIADMK, that the Centre had to take a note. Within two months of the agitation, Jawaharlal Nehru moved the first amendment to the Constitution empowering the States to provide special provisions for the advancement of the socially and educationally backward classes of citizens, including the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In 1951, the Tamil Nadu Government passed a fresh order restoring communal reservations.

Since independence the backward communities in Tamil Nadu had been enjoying a 31 per cent reservation in the State government services. Then in 1979 M.G. Ramachandran introduced the income ceiling of Rs. 9000/- per annum for any backward caste member to be eligible for the reserved quota. ¹⁵⁶ But this sparked off a hue and cry with the DMK and the DK, both essentially political parties of the backward castes by demanding a reversal of MGR's decision on the economic criterion. ¹⁵⁷ MGR would have stood by his decision but for the crippling defeat the AIADMK suffered at the hands of ¹⁵⁸ the Congress(I) - DMK combine in 1980 Lok Sabha elections. In a

panic reaction, he not only scraped the economic criterion but also boosted the backward class quota from 31 to 50 per cent.¹⁵⁹ Thus the total number of reserved seats in Tamil Nadu came to 69 per cent, including 19 per cent reservation for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The members belonging to Scheduled Castes and Tribes were also permitted to compete for the jobs in the remaining 31 per cent open category.

With backward castes constituting about seventy per cent of the population Tamil Nadu is virtually in the hands of these communities politically and administratively.¹⁶⁰ This explains why the Mandal report was so favourably received in the State and the non-backward communities which are only eight per cent of the State's 5.5 crore population had not cared to pick up a fight against the report.¹⁶¹

Today in Tamil Nadu the forward communities are trying to get into the backward classes list while the backward classes are vying with one another to get into the list of most backward classes.

Kerala

Kerala, the only State in the country where political parties were formed on caste and communal lines, was also the first State to introduce reservations on caste and communal basis, apart from statutory reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.¹⁶² 40% of government jobs and seats in educational institutions are reserved for backward classes and Muslims. Ezhayas,

the most populous backward caste, gets 14% followed by Muslims 12%, Christians 5% and other sundry backward communities, the remaining 9% .¹⁶³

While the ruling Left Democratic Front led by the CPI(M) welcomed the Centre's decision, the opposition United Democratic Front, a Confederation of castes and communal parties, under the Congress(I) Leadership, found itself in an embarrassing situation.¹⁶⁴ Mr Karunakaran, Congress(I) leader, criticised the Centre for excluding seats in educational institutions from the purview of reservation.¹⁶⁵ He said : "what is the use of reservation in government jobs without reservation in educational institutions."¹⁶⁶

The real problem in the UDF was the internal contradictions among its constituents. While the National Democratic Party, political arm of the forward Nair community, opposed caste-based reservations, the Social Republic Party, political wing of the backward Ezhava community, favoured it. The opposition in Kerala failed to evolve a common strategy because of the opposing views of the two of the UDF partners.

The Chief Minister, Mr E.K. Nayanar, said that the system of reservation now in force in Kerala would continue for the present and the Government had no plans to make any changes in current procedures at the moment.¹⁶⁷ He said that the lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes prepared by the State Government would continue unchanged for the present. Mr Nayanar

appealed to the Nair Service Society, which planned an agitation to press reservation on economic basis, to desist from the agitation. He asked the NSS not to do anything which would divide the people communally. He regretted that the implementation of Mandal Commission's recommendations was being delayed unduly. Mr Nayanar said that the Centre was trying to get social justice for backward classes by implementing the Mandal Commission report and it was only proper to support it.

Karnataka

In Karnataka, reservations have existed since the pre-independence days when the Millars Committee was in force.¹⁶⁸ Since 1977 the State Government in accordance with the recommendations of the Havanur Commission has reserved jobs and seats in educational institutions for backward classes. But the most controversial backward classes report did not provide any reservation for the Vokkaligas and the Lingayats, the dominant communities in the State. The Vokkaligas started a violent agitation against the report which forced the Ramakrishna Hegda Government to discard the report in 1984. Both the communities have, however, been covered under the Mandal Commission report. This explains why opposition to V.P. Singh's announcement implementing the Mandal Commission report had been muted in Karnataka.

The Janata Dal leader and the leader of the opposition in the state Legislative Assembly, Mr D.B. Chandregowda, predictably

hailed the Union Government's decision as a welcome step. He said: "For the first time since independence a government has genuinely done something for the rural masses".¹⁶⁹ He felt that the policy of reservation had really benefited the people in the South.

Andhra Pradesh

While the rest of the South remained peaceful, Congress(I) ruled Andhra Pradesh had its share of rail and rasta rokos, protest rallies and bandhs.¹⁷⁰ Stray incidents of arson were reported, though mercifully no lives were lost.¹⁷¹ If the agitation did not take an ugly turn it was possible because it was a spontaneous student movement and not one engineered by political parties.¹⁷²

The Andhra Pradesh Backward Classes Commission, however, welcomed the Centre's decision to implement the Mandal Commission report. Mr P.C. Sarthy, leader of the Nava Sangarsh Samiti, on other hand, stressed the need for a country-wide debate on the subject.

In Andhra Pradesh, the Muralidhar Rao Commission, appointed in 1982, recommended 44% reservation for backward classes against the prevailing 25%. The Government Order to implement 44% reservation for backward classes was challenged in Andhra Pradesh High Court and an agitation was launched by Nava Sangarsh Samiti against the Order. The High Court struck down the Government Order. The Telegu Desham Government lacked the will to take the issue to the Supreme Court or face an anti-reservation agitation in the State and

adopted to revert to the status quo of 25% reservation for the backward classes.

V

Reaction of Political Parties:

Initially no political leader or no political party came out against the implementation of Mandal Commission report because they feared that opposition to reservation policy might cause the loss of backward castes votes. Moreover, every political party had supported reservation in the past. But when the anti-reservation agitation hit the country, the political parties described V.P. Singh's announcement implementing 27 per cent reservation for backward classes as "a hasty step for electoral gain" and demanded reservation on economic basis. The backward caste members of every political party had, however, welcomed the implementation of Mandal report.

The Congress (I) in a resolution adopted on August 30 maintained that economic criteria could not be divorced from caste-based reservation for backward classes and rejected Prime Minister V.P. Singh's contention that doing so would dilute the Mandal report. ¹⁷³ Mr V.N. Gadgil releasing the resolution at a press conference pointed out that while the party was not opposed to reservations as such, it would also go along with the recommendations of the Mandal Commission about the socially and educationally backward classes provided that the Government accepted the Rajiv

Formula which says that "equality and fair play demand that job reservations and other special measures for the backward classes as a whole not be pre-empted by the richer or more privileged segments of backward classes"¹⁷⁴.

Mr Rajiv Gandhi felt that the primary aim of the founding fathers of the Constitution was the creation of a casteless society. But by accepting reservation on the basis of caste, the nation would lose sight of the primary aim — the creation of a casteless society.¹⁷⁵ He called for an "economic cut off" to decide the issue. During his speech in Parliament, Mr Gandhi even admitted that the Congress(I) policies of introducing caste-based reservations in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh were a mistake. Mr Dinesh Singh, the Congress(I) leader, said that the announcement on reservations had been made without arriving a national "consensus". He alleged that Mr V.P. Singh took the step with an eye on the next election.¹⁷⁶

The 22-member Congress(I) Working Committee and 12-member Political Affairs Committee met jointly on September 3. Rajiv Gandhi brought a resolution which advocated the total rejection of the Mandal report. However, no sooner did the meeting begin than the Party stood clearly divided along caste and class lines. Vasant Sathe, a brahmin, attacked the report, declaring : "V.P. Singh is reviving the caste system. The Party must fight it"¹⁷⁷. An aggressive array of backward class leaders like B. Shankaranand, Sita Ram Kesari, P. Shiv Sankar, D.P. Yadav and Margathan Chandrashekhar, on the other hand, countered: "The Congress has always fought for

the downtrodden. How can we oppose it?"¹⁷⁸

That the Mandal report had hopelessly divided the Congress (I) along caste lines was evident when Charanjit Yadav, a backward class leader, openly welcomed the Centre's decision to implement 27 per cent reservation for backward classes.

The Left Parties who were the supporters of National Front Government called for modifications in the implementation of the Mandal report. The CPI was the first to come out in defence of the reservation. The party emphasised that economic criterion should be the main factor in determining the backwardness of a particular class to be included in the list of such beneficiaries.¹⁷⁹ The Party felt concerned over the present agitation by the students and others who were opposed to the job quota for the backward classes.¹⁸⁰ The CPI(M) also opposed the anti-reservation agitation in several parts of the country. The Party General Secretary, R.K. Ramachandran, said that while it was necessary to strickly implement the existing provisions for reservations, it was also necessary to extend such privileges to other backward castes.¹⁸¹

The CPI(M) was opposed to caste-based-reservations. The Party was of the view that the reservation of jobs should be done on the basis of economic backwardness of the backward communities. Mr Surjit pointed out that mere reservation of jobs would not solve the problem of backwardness among backward communities. What was needed was that enough job opportunities should be created by

effectively implementing land reforms and other measures of social
change. ¹⁸²

The Mandal virus succeeded in dividing the West Bengal CPI(M) with anti-Mandal and the Kerala CPI(M) with pro-Mandal. While the Kerala CPI(M) welcomed the implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations, the West Bengal CPI(M) criticised it as a "hasty step for electoral gain". Jyoti Basu, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, wrote to V.P. Singh to introduce economic criteria and to ensure that job applicants from West Bengal were not deprived as there were no OBCs in the State.

The BJP was the hardest hit by the Mandal missile as it defeated their ploy of uniting Hindus under their saffron emblem. Dr Vijoy Kumar Malhotra, the BJP M.P., described the reservation of jobs "without availability of jobs" as a "mockery and political stunt" on the part of the Government. ¹⁸³ The Party General Secretary, Krishanlal Sharma, maintained that the Government had taken a ¹⁸⁴ hasty decision for some electoral gains. Several BJP leaders, including Vajpayee and Advani, had spoken about how economic criteria and not caste should have been the basis for job reservations. ¹⁸⁵ Advani in early September had expressed scepticism over V.P. Singh's move to call an all party meeting to discuss ¹⁸⁶ the reservation issue. He said the meeting would in no way end the nationwide turmoil caused by the Mandal report since it was ¹⁸⁷ meant only for discussing ways to implement the report. Of late, however, the Party said that the decision to implement the report

was made in a hurry without consulting friendly parties and that the Government had made no serious attempts to talk to the agitating students.¹⁸⁸

Both L.K. Advani and Atal Behari Vajpayee threatened to withdraw their support if the Government did not review its stand.¹⁸⁹ The BJP was, however, was not completely devoid of Mandal supporters. Many of its backward MPs from Rajasthan and Bihar welcomed the centre's decision to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendations.

VI

Factional Politics in Janata Dal

The Mandal issue had led to factional politics in Janata Dal, the principal constituent of National Front Government. Many members of the Party came out attacking the Mandal report and criticising V.P. Singh though Sharad Yadav, Ram Vilash Pashwan, Jaipal Reddy, S.R. Bommai and Ajit Singh were the staunch supporters of V.P. Singh. The sharp divisions within the party on the issue of the Government's decision on the Mandal Commission's report and its handling of the present unrest was clearly reflected in Mr Chandra Sekhar's urging the Government to take effective steps to "restore a feeling of trust and confidence among the youth" and warning that any provocative action on its part "will be suicidal and history will not forgive us".¹⁹⁰ Biju Patnaik, the Chief Minister of Orissa, accused the Prime Minister of inciting caste violence.

He took a tough stand by openly opposing Prime Minister V.P. Singh's acceptance of Mandal Commission recommendation of 27 per cent reservation for the socially and educationally backward classes and asserted that it would not be implemented in Orissa as it was "full of errors"¹⁹¹. The U.P. Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav, on the other hand, supported the Mandal report. He said that there should be more reservations for backward classes than what was suggested in the Mandal report.

Both Yashwant Sinha and Harmohan Dhawan also condemned the Mandal report. Jaipal Reddy, spokesman of Janata Dal, however, said : "It was part of our election manifesto and he (V.P. Singh)¹⁹² as a loyal party soldier is determined to implement it". Reported Dhawan, the new General Secretary of the National Front Parliamentary Party : "It is not a question of manifesto. Should we plunge the country into a caste war just for retaining power?"¹⁹³ The Janata Dal Secretary, Mr Arvind Chaturvedi, severely criticised the National Front Government for accepting the Mandal Commission's recommendations and said it would balkanize the society.¹⁹⁴ He said that any reservations for jobs or other facilities should be based on economic grounds and not on caste lines.¹⁹⁵ He pointed out: "The Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, has committed a political harakari by accepting the Commission's recommendations under the pressure of political expediency"¹⁹⁶.

Mr Lalit Vijoy Singh, a Lok Sabha member, had written to the Prime Minister against the Mandal report. Mr Vishwendra Singh

even resigned his Lok Sabha seat in protest against the report. Recalling the Prime Minister's statement on September 1 that the recommendations of Mandal Commission would be implemented in phases and 27 per cent reservation for the OBCs was the first phase he said : "Of all the recommendations you chose the 27 per cent reservation. The other recommendations of the Mandal Commission report, if one goes by an objective assessment, are more basic and important than present choice and priority. Without implementing the other recommendations no policy of reservation can yield fruitful results".¹⁹⁷ He said that the Mandal Commission had also recommended radical reforms to change oppressive production relations, setting up of financial and technical institutions to help the OBCs and implementation of educational reforms. The Government, he said, should make reservations wholly neutral to caste, religion, sex or race and follow economic criterion.¹⁹⁸

The members of Janata Dal who opposed the Mandal report were, however, in a hopeless minority and stood arrayed against powerful backward leaders like Hukum Dev, Narayan Yadav, Ram Avdesh Singh, Satya Prakash Malaviya and Ram Dhan who had become V.P. Singh's most ardent supporters. Even Janata Dal President, S.R. Bommai, after initial reticence, came out roaring in favour of the Mandal report. He said : "If the report is not implemented, there will be a bloody revolution in the country".¹⁹⁹ Industry Minister, Ajit Singh, directed his supporters to organise a pro-

Mandal rally. Ram Vilash Paswan while addressing a pro-reservation rally organised by the National Union of Backward Castes in New Delhi said : "People get married on the basis of caste, but when we talk of reservations they say that we are breaking the country. These anti-reservationists talk about dividing the country on the basis of caste".²⁰⁰ Arun Nehru and Arif Mohammad Khan were the only central ministers who condemned the Mandal report.

Casting him as a messiah of the backwards V.P. Singh told Parliament that each time anybody came forward to help the down-trodden vested interests always opposed his endeavours.²⁰¹ There was no caste war, he told incredulous M.P.s with a straight face, the scattered violence was the inevitable consequence of a revolutionary change directed at the poor and the dispossessed.²⁰²

VII

Withdrawal of Support

Ever since late August, 1990, several BJP leaders had been hinting that their disenchantment with the National Front Government had got to a point of no return.²⁰³ On 21 September, for instance, several BJP leaders, including Madan Lal Khurana, M.P., warned that their party would be forced to consider withdrawing support to the Government if it did not stop the repression of the anti-Mandal student agitation.²⁰⁴

Earlier, at the BJP's Bhopal meet held in mid-September, Advani and others had issued highly critical statements against V.P. Singh's government and had warned that their support should not be taken for granted. The BJP's main objection to the Mandal report was that they could well lead to disintegration of Hindu community. The ^{Party} felt — with the Congress (I) — that the Government's decision could provoke caste holocaust. V.P. Singh, in an attempt to garner electoral gains, resorted to as cheap a trick as this.

The BJP leadership seemed convinced that in the wake of V.P. Singh Mandalising the country, only the Hindu card could save it at the hustings. Advani announced that he would participate in a 10,000 kilometre 'rath yatra' from Somnath to Ayodhya. Covering 300 kilometres a day, the Yatris would pass through eight states, mobilising support for the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Advani invited all party members to join the 'Kar Seva' which would follow the 'rath yatra'.

Advani's message was clear. If the Raja persisted in his attempts to win votes by fragmenting Hindu society with such weapons as the Mandal Commission report, the BJP would go all out to unite Hindus on the Ram Janmabhumi issue. As Advani set off on his DCM Toyota with 'rath yatra' determined that on October 30 Kar Seva would take place on the disputed Ram Janmabhumi-Babri Masjid complex, it became clear that time was

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running out for V.P. Singh. With Advani wending his way through Bihar and into U.P. it became a race between the two Yadav Chief Ministers as to who would arrest Advani. Ultimately, it was Laloo Yadav who did so on October 23 in Samastipur. Atal Behari Vajpayee returned to Delhi from Calcutta and ^{at} 10.30 a.m. he called on the President and finally withdrew support to the V.P. Singh Government.²¹¹

V.P. Singh told the President R. Venkataraman that he would prove his majority in the House on the floor of the Lok Sabha. November 7 was fixed as the date for the vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha and V.P. Singh lost the vote of confidence in the House. Thus eleven month tenure National Front Government lost power.

VIII

Reservation in Post V.P. Singh Era

After V.P. Singh, Chandra Sekhar with the support of Congress (I) was sworn in as Prime Minister of care-taker government at the Centre. Chandra Sekhar was not against the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, but he did not show any courage to implement these recommendations. In 1991 Lok Sabha elections the Congress (I) made the implementation of the Mandal report a part of its election manifesto. Having captured power at the centre, the Narasimha Rao Government issued an order on September 25, 1991, to fulfil its election commitment. The Narasimha Rao

Government made 10 per cent reservation on the basis of economic criteria in addition to 27 per cent reservation for socially and educationally backward classes in central services. It should be noted that this time there was no anti-reservation agitation as the country witnessed during V.P. Singh era, which clearly proved that the anti-reservationists during V.P. Singh era were politically motivated and the way in which V.P. Singh announced the implementation of 27 per cent reservation for socially and educationally backward classes recommended by the Mandal Commission openly sought political opportunity which made the other political parties oppose the announcement.

The Supreme Court's judgement of November 25, 1992 assumed great significance in so far as the reservation policy of the government was concerned. The Supreme Court struck down the Narasimha Rao Government's order of September 25, 1991, making 10 per cent reservation on the basis of economic criteria and raising the total reservation to more than 50 per cent and upheld the validity of V.P. Singh Government's order on 27 per cent quota and 49.5 per cent overall. The Supreme Court declared that the reservation exceeding 50 per cent would not be constitutional and that the "creamy layer" among the backward classes must be excluded from the benefits of reservation. The Mandal Commission's recommendation reserving 27 per cent jobs for socially and educationally backward classes excluding the "creamy layer" became effective with a notification issued on September 8, 1993, by the Welfare Minister, Mr Sitaram Kesari.

Party Postion in the Lok Sabha:1952-1989

Year	No. of seats	Cong./ Cong. (I)	CPI	CPI-M	KMPP/ PSP & SSP	BJS/ BJP	BLD/ Janata/ Janata Dal	Janata (S)/ Lok Dal	Other Parties	Ind.
1952	489	364	16		9	3			59	38
1957	494	371	27		19	4			31	42
1962	494	361	29		12	14			58	20
1967	520	283	23	19	36	35			89	35
1971	518	352	23	25	5	22			77	14
1977	542	154	7	22			295		55	9
1980	542	353	11	36			31	41	48	9
1984	542	415	6	22		2	10	3	79	5
1989	542	193	12	32		88	141		59	-

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